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PROGRAMS, JUDGESHIPS AND FACILITIES TOP JUDGE'S LIST

MOUNT HOLLY - Burlington County's top judge, Assignment Judge John A. Sweeney, delivered an unprecedented State of the Judiciary Address. In an effort to improve communication and collaboration with the County, this new measure was introduced. Sweeney said with great enthusiasm, that the "county's judicial system remains strong, vibrant and innovative."

he freeholders heard an accounting of the court's caseload. Filings totaled 47,268-this marks the number of new cases which the County Judiciary received last year. The breakdown by category was 25,363 civil cases, 1,969 criminal case, and 19,936 family cases. This total number was down 6% from the previous year. Court officials maintain that they expect that number to rise again during the present Court Year. Cases must be in accordance with time goals that the court imposes upon itself. Cases outside of these strict goals are said to be in backlog. Judge Sweeney said the courts have reduced backlog in each of the last five years-last year by 8%.

"Despite fiscal constraints, as well as judge and staff shortages, the judicial branch continues to innovate, experiment, and enhance the public's ability to resolve disputes," reported Judge Sweeney. Examples of some of the Burlington Court's accomplishments follow:

The County's 40 municipal courts processed 220,364 cases

The Probation Division supervised over 5,000 offenders and collected over one million dollars in fines and restitution

Drug Court celebrated its first anniversary and now has 47 full time participants

We implemented the Judiciary's Electronic Filing and Imaging System in our Special Civil Part, which provides significant savings to court users, attorneys and staff in time and efficiency, physical space and accuracy of data entry. This is our first move toward creating a paperless court

With the assistance of the county, we made another technological advancement in the conversion of our video system. Video teleconferencing continues to save time and expense, especially in the review of jail and detention cases

The online payment of traffic tickets has expanded to all Burlington County Municipal Courts

Events surrounding the county floods prompted revisions to our Continuity of Operations Plan

The Court's Finance Division was restructured

Burlington Judiciary's EEO/AA program was reorganized under a new court executive to head up this effort

The Vicinage's Advisory Committee on Minority Concerns has been revitalized. Citizens from across the county participate.

Successful Law Day, Youth and Government, and Opening Ceremonies have all been revitalized.

Not everything was rosy in the Judge's speech. Sweeney highlighted two areas of concern. The first was related to the

number of judges in the county. Retirements, slow reappointments, and an impending temporary assignment to the Appellate Division have all affected the number of judges hearing cases. Court officials maintain Burlington's caseload requires 19 full time judges. The authorized judge strength for the county has not gone beyond 17, with it frequently being lower.

Lastly, Sweeney raised issues regarding the court facilities. The courts receive complaints regarding lighting, signage, and cramped waiting areas. The judge asked the freeholders to place priority attention on the infrastructure, in light of 300K people per year who visit the courts. Judge Sweeney exclaimed, "We bring these matters to your attention so that you can proactively address them as you prepare your capital improvement projects for the future."

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